



4.1. SYSTEM OVERVIEW

National transportation surveys indicate that more than half the auto trips in the United States are less than two miles long. More than 25% of car trips in the United States are one mile or less, and 14% percent of car trips are a half-mile or less. But, Americans choose to leave their car behind for trips less than a mile only 25% of the time. In comparison, according to the London National Travel Survey, 39% of trips in London less than five miles in length are walked, and 80% of trips less than one mile in length are walked. In the Netherlands, up to 40% of all trips nationwide are made by bicycle, and a third of the people ride their bike to work everyday. One percent of all trips in American cities are by bicycle. Part of this difference is due to denser development in clusters, better pedestrian infrastructure, and intelligent land use policies in European cities. **Developing a pedestrian plan that encourages a reversal of the current tendency to drive short trips or that provides for more opportunities to make short trips would provide the largest benefit the City can achieve over the long term.**

A preferred pedestrian environment would position schools, businesses, and entertainment in the center of a cluster of residences that use these services daily. As one travels out from a compact center, high density housing becomes compact single family houses, then suburban housing, then transitions to rural residential areas and agricultural land that soon becomes suburban and then urban centers again. This development pattern makes it easy for residents to walk to their daily chores, with the option of using automobiles on connecting roads to make less frequent trips to neighboring communities.

Downtown Albemarle was initially designed around the locomotive, and thus around the pedestrian as well. Pedestrian corridors in this area are easy to spot. Since the automobile has arrived, it has spurred a different type of growth (particularly around the Highway 24/27 Bypass). Albemarle has grown outward, and clusters of pedestrian centers have become difficult to identify. However, potential pedestrian corridors can be developed from current automotive corridors that connect destinations.

4.2. PEDESTRIAN ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT DISTRICTS

The Albemarle Comprehensive Pedestrian Plan is focused around a series of ***Pedestrian Oriented Development Districts***. By identifying neighborhoods that presently or potentially have community necessities such as residential areas, shopping areas, schools, parks, and employment centers, a successful pedestrian plan can be implemented. The two most important factors in designing a walkable community are pedestrian infrastructure and distance. There is a possibility that if the infrastructure is put in place physically or by policy, then the surrounding growth would develop to the pedestrian scale. So just as communities once evolved to fit with the pedestrian, then the horse and wagon, the train, the car; they can evolve to accommodate the pedestrian once again. A non-motorized transportation corridor installed today could attract appropriate shops and restaurants tomorrow.

These Pedestrian Oriented Development Districts are defined using quarter mile and half-mile radius circles that currently have or potentially will have the ingredients necessary for frequent walking trips. A quarter mile is the distance that is most likely to be considered walkable by the greatest number of pedestrians. It is preferred that the majority of the most frequented trip generators be located within the quarter mile district. A half mile is considered to be the upper



limit for most simple walking trips, and this portion of the Pedestrian Oriented Development District is usually best suited for lower density residential areas or less frequented trip generators. This plan identifies the center of each district and defines the borders of both the quarter mile and half mile radii. Greenways and other pedestrian infrastructure connect these districts to each other.

Each of these Pedestrian Oriented Development Districts can be developed differently. Some might develop as a true community, with all of the elements that create a functioning society including significant residential and shopping areas. Infill and redevelopment of these districts can potentially accommodate the mixed-use and higher density desired for a “walkable community.”

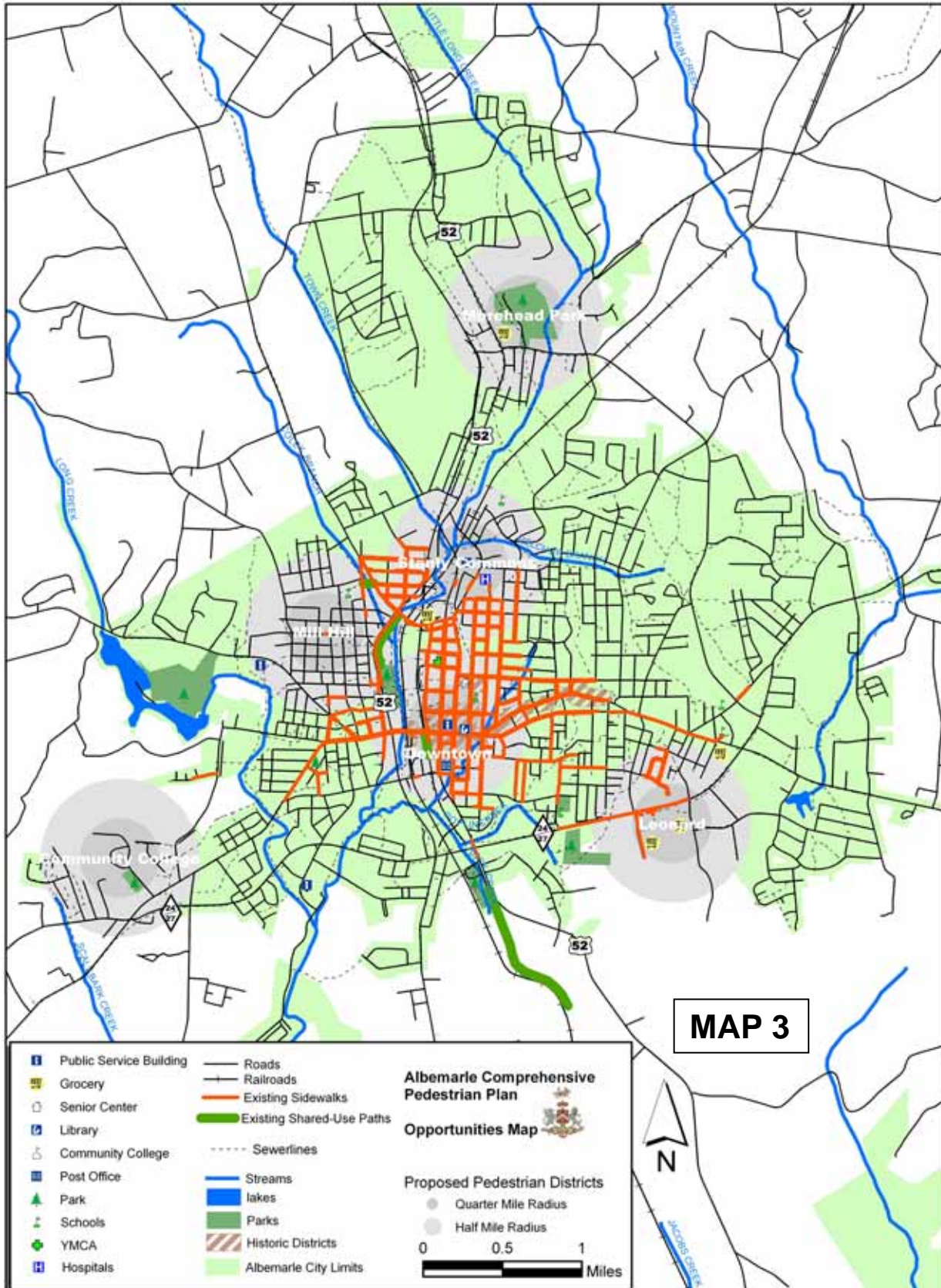
Alternately, the Pedestrian Oriented Development Districts might develop more as primarily residential neighborhoods that do not have significant commercial sections. Policies supporting connectivity and higher density would support a more walkable neighborhood, and the existence of a school, community center, or another public meeting facility where the residents have shared ownership would help bring the neighborhood together socially. These Pedestrian Oriented Development Districts might not be as densely developed as the communities mentioned above, but would benefit Albemarle’s walking environment if they included a mix of low, medium and high density units with good connectivity and a central public gathering place. Allowing mixed-use zoning designations in portions of these neighborhoods would provide small business opportunities and a greater sense of community.

Several of the following identified Pedestrian Oriented Development Districts have been labeled as such based on their potential to develop. These designations were only based on an educated guess as to whether significant commercial/mixed use development could be drawn to the area in the future, and should not be considered a certainty. Proper zoning and support from Albemarle’s Planning Commission and City Council could help develop these areas into walkable mixed-use communities.

The designated Pedestrian Oriented Development Districts are intended primarily to identify areas in which pedestrian-friendly development should be encouraged. Recommendations for policies related to these districts are discussed in Section 8. Although many proposed pedestrian infrastructure projects are located within one or more of these districts, it is important to note that **sidewalks, paths, other infrastructure projects, and policies can and should be implemented outside of these districts as well.**

Map 3 illustrates opportunities for pedestrian improvements in the Albemarle area, focused on the Pedestrian Oriented Development Districts. Major pedestrian destinations are also identified on the map.

Descriptions of the opportunities that exist in each of the districts are provided on the following pages, referenced by the district areas as mapped in Map 3. The project map (Map 4) shown in Section 7 of this plan illustrates improvements suggested in this section.





I. Downtown

Albemarle's historical downtown is the ideal Pedestrian Oriented Development District. The center point for this district is at City Hall, and is surrounded by the library, the post office, an elementary school, a senior center, the YMCA, and a greenway. This is the model for what Albemarle should want each of the other five districts mentioned in this plan to eventually resemble to some extent. It has a compact shopping and service district with wide sidewalks, a connecting street pattern, residential units within walking distance of the business center, and a pleasant environment that includes tree-lined narrow roads, pedestrian lighting, public open space, low vehicle speeds and low automobile traffic volumes. In addition, Albemarle draws people downtown to do business because it is the County Seat. These people become downtown's pedestrians.



Opportunities in this district are almost endless. Businesses have been returning to downtown for several years now. The lure of traditional American town centers has attracted private investment in these places recently, and Albemarle is no exception. Increasing its residential base in the immediate central business area and encouraging necessary retail markets such as grocery, hardware, and general stores will further create a small but fully self-contained and functioning urban community. It has been determined that placing jobs

near housing reduces vehicle trips somewhat more than placing housing only near retail, so downtown being Albemarle's employment center creates the need to increase the density of desirable residential units in this district to achieve the maximum amount of walking trips.

Pedestrian improvements and economic stimulation in this district will benefit all of Albemarle with a sustainable center piece to the community.

II. Leonard

In many communities, the location with the highest percentage of pedestrians is the government housing district. Car ownership and access statistics are not readily available for Albemarle, but

it can be assumed that this particular area includes a population that may depend more heavily depends on non-motorized transportation than other sections of the City. These residents commonly have inadequate walking facilities and little representation, but nonetheless find ways to travel by foot.



Economically depressed areas typically show the worn signs of pedestrians walking along roads without



sidewalks or with holes cut through fenced-off areas exist near shopping areas. Pedestrians involved in motor vehicle accidents on these roadways may have been forced to take risks because of the lack of proper pedestrian accommodations. These risks may be taken because these residents have no other choice.

The chosen center point for this district is the Wal-Mart, which is across the highway from the principal residential areas in this part of Albemarle. The location of Albemarle's government housing district is in fairly close proximity to this Wal-Mart shopping area, downtown, the businesses on Main Street, and the Waddell Center. The primary opportunity here is the ease with which connections can be made that give some of these residents a more direct and safe route to places they need to go. Evaluating the several locations where safe walkways are needed and considering ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) accessibility concerns will make this area easier to navigate by foot. See section 5.4 for more information on ADA Guidelines.

Development opportunities also exist south of the Wal-Mart, and smart land use decisions and connectivity planned now can create a better pedestrian environment for future residents.

Pedestrian improvements in this district will greatly benefit the low income residents of Albemarle.

III. Mill Hill

This old mill neighborhood surrounds a Baptist Church and a small but abandoned retail center. The elementary school campus sits on the edge of this neighborhood, with both Montgomery and City Lake Parks being within walking distance for its residents, if a safe route is created. Very little right of way exists on these narrow streets, trees line the road, and the building setbacks are not far from the roadway. The grid-like patterns of the roads offer good connectivity as well. These conditions, along with steep grades, would make it difficult to retrofit sidewalks in this neighborhood, but at the same time, provide decent traffic calming on roadways that are already low in traffic volume.



Being mostly a residential neighborhood, a pedestrian plan will benefit the residents here by encouraging safe streets or by encourage nearby future shopping vendors (possibly near the corner of Wiscassett and Hill). Pedestrian travel here could be positively influenced by minor improvements to connectivity, additional traffic calming such as four-way stops and pedestrian crosswalks, some nearby mixed-use developments, and multi-use pedestrian pathways to connect them to the nearby parks. The convenient locations of an interconnecting system of sewer lines provide potential trail corridors near this district and throughout the City.

Pedestrian improvements and economic stimulation in this district will primarily benefit the diverse age and income levels of the residents in these neighborhoods.



IV. Chuck Morehead Park

The center point for this Pedestrian Oriented Development District, Chuck Morehead Park, might create the catalyst for a new mixed-use community. But it will need some help. Right now, there is little in this area to drive the development of higher density housing units surrounding a park. Many residents seeking land here are purposely trying to find a neighborhood away from the traffic of the nearby highways, and possibly prefer not to have multi-family housing in their neighborhood. The possibility does exist though, of the land surrounding this park to be developed with single family homes on small lots.



It would be prudent to request that future developments here use this park as its "Town Center" and create a road and pedestrian path system that connects directly to it instead of solely to the main roads. Further connecting the park with pleasant pedestrian routes to the grocery and retail areas on US 52 will give residents the option of walking to their shopping destinations. A mixed-use development in this district would make this a future hot spot of North Albemarle and help to preserve some of the existing open space and farm land in the vicinity by focusing the sprawl development in this tight circle.

Pedestrian connections, a land use plan that incorporates a public park as part of a planned community, and mixed use land development will benefit the residents of northern Albemarle. It will also create economic stimulation and tax revenue, and control unplanned sprawl in the north side of town.

V. Stanly Commons

This government center, and past shopping mall, will serve as an excellent center to this Pedestrian Oriented Development District. Stanly Commons is already a popular walking area for many groups of residents, particularly



Albemarle's retired community. Within this district there is a substantial amount of high and low density residential units, a hospital campus, an abandoned rail right of way, power line and a sewer easement (good for shared-use paths), and a high school. While some of the neighborhood roads close to the hospital have sidewalks, most do not. Wide neighborhood roads that exist in this district act to encourage high automobile speeds. This lack of safe and comfortable walking facilities might be





one reason why residents must walk inside Stanly Commons for exercise, and why few can walk to this facility from the neighboring areas. These wide roads, however, might provide an inexpensive solution to this lack of safe facilities.

A high school is often the cultural center of a small town. Albemarle's high school campus houses a beautiful stadium and running track, along with finely landscaped grounds and appealing architecture. The nearby residential community is limited to an apartment complex across the street and few single family homes. The school's adjacent roadways, however, are wide enough to accommodate some pedestrian infrastructure.

The location of the hospital in the district will certainly be a large benefit to this plan. The hospital's campus itself can act as a pedestrian activity center. A nearby abandoned railroad offers recreation and transportation opportunities that the hospital and its visitors could enjoy.

Pedestrian improvements and economic stimulation in this district will benefit a very wide range of residents. School children, the elderly, lower and middle income families, and hospital staff and visitors will all be positively impacted by a greater emphasis on pleasant walking facilities.

VI. Stanly Community College

Presently an automobile-access only section of the City, this section can highly benefit from surrounding residential development opportunities, more connectivity, shared-use paths, and nearby food vendors (preferably on campus). Community college campuses are large economic centers of many communities, so pedestrian improvements and economic stimulation in this district will benefit multiple students and staff in the region, as well as offer walkable eating and shopping opportunities for commuters.



In this case, as with many community colleges, students enrolled in this school typically commute to this campus by automobile. The purpose of creating a pedestrian community around the school is to keep those students, instructors, and staff from driving elsewhere for lunch or errands. The use of the campus by surrounding residents for community events on nights or weekends will also be a valuable social gain.



4.3. ROADWAY CORRIDORS

This plan stresses the three main route needs of pedestrians; 1) short and direct; 2) safe; and 3) pleasurable. Because of high traffic volumes, zoning, and growth opportunities, highway corridors often have a great amount of commercial and residential development, and thus have a great amount of trip generators. These corridors are often 1) long in distance; 2) generally unsafe for pedestrians; and 3) unpleasant for pedestrians. However, since these roadways serve as the only access to many of the major shopping opportunities, they need to be certain to provide acceptable transportation accommodations for pedestrians.



A. All Highway and Roadway Corridors in Albemarle

By policy, the United States Department of Transportation, the North Carolina Department of Transportation and the City of Albemarle have the opportunity to incorporate what is known as a *Complete Streets Policy* on every one of its arterials within the city limits of Albemarle.

Complete Streets Policy:

A policy where every new or refurbished roadway should be designed and built to be able to functionally, safely and comfortably accommodate motorized and non-motorized transportation. Motorized vehicles (automobiles) and non-motorized vehicles (bicycles) should both be accommodated together in the road right-of-way, with separate lane designations, additional roadway width, or additional shoulder pavement for each where appropriate. Pedestrians should have a grade-separated travel corridor, along with appropriate and safe road-crossing points and acceptable access points to destinations.



US Highway 52

B. Historic Pee Dee Avenue and Main Streets



Residential and historic Pee Dee Avenue extends east from downtown until it merges with Main Street, which is currently a mix of older historic stores, gas stations, parking lots, vacant buildings, and other buildings. Zoning this strip as a mixed use corridor that encourages restaurants, shopping, arts and entertainment, and other such uses could spur economic growth and attract pedestrians. Many cities are redesigning streets such as this to become their “signature street” radiating from their downtown area. In addition to the Complete Streets Policy, this roadway could incorporate

narrow roadways, on street parking, wide sidewalks with shade trees, benches, and public open space. With time, this investment may attract an eclectic mix of businesses geared towards pedestrians to live and shop in this section of Albemarle. It may also create a valuable east-west pedestrian connection from downtown to the East Albemarle Elementary and Albemarle Middle School region.

4.4. OTHER OFF ROAD CITY-WIDE CORRIDORS

The numerous creeks, sewer lines, railroad corridors, and other utility easements and lowlands that surround Albemarle offer the City the opportunity to develop a shared-use path system that circumnavigates the City. This path system can help define the prime development boundaries as the City grows, and have a plan in place before the growth occurs so that these paths can be linked to the destinations appropriately without the need to retrofit.